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#### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

\* \* The attention of scientific men is called to the advantages of the correspondence columns of SCIENCE for placing promptly on record brief preliminary notices of their investigations. Twenty copies of the number containing his communication will be furnished free to any correspondent on request.

The editor will be glad to publish any queries consonant with the character of the journal.

Correspondents are requested to be as brief as possible. The writer's name is in all cases required as proof of good faith.

#### Romantic Love and Personal Beauty.

YOUR reviewer has pointed out that the light and flippant character of Mr. Finck's style prevents his book from being taken as a serious contribution to science. He has neglected to show that the unintermitting vulgarity of its tone will cause it to have an exceedingly vicious effect upon society, if it should chance to have any effect at all. Romantic love is one of the few thoroughly beautiful and elevated things that civilization has yet produced. It is such a means of refining and subduing the brute in man, and of bringing him a little nearer to the angels, as is no other emotion which he has yet developed. When a young man and a maiden are in love, they walk in a very heaven, not of happiness only, but of delicacy and purity. The poets and the worthy novelists have invested the subject with a warm glow of high feeling and noble aspiration, and even the unworthy novelists have not dared to drag it wholly in the dust. It has been reserved for a Mr. Finck to write of it in a tone which is not equalled by the commonest and most vulgar of the daily newspapers. It is incomprehensible that a book which is offered to decent people to read should contain such a sentence as this, to take an instance at random: "Has Mr. Spencer ever kissed a girl?" Romantic love is a precious possession which the race has been slow to gain. It is possible that it is like a delicate flower, which cannot be handled by the botanist without losing its beauty and its fragrance. At all events, it is of immense importance, if it is to become the subject of scientific investigation, that it should not be vulgarized and cheapened at the very beginning by such a manner of writing as this.

Mr. Finck's book contains a number of very clever explanations of minor points in biology and psychology. His main theses are not new; and, as Mr. Conn has pointed out, it is premarital courtship, and not love, that he has shown, or that can be shown, to be very modern. His explanations, while they are extremely ingenious, always need to be carefully examined, and are seldom fortified by his reasons. His conception of how delicate a task it is to establish a relation of cause and effect may be gathered from the following passage: "Large numbers of tourists in Switzerland constantly suffer from headache, simply because they fail to have the head at night in the centre of the room, where it ought to be, because the air circulates more freely there than near the walls." His literary style is on no higher level than his taste and his logic. He speaks of "a blue-blooded youth and a ditto maiden," and of "knocking the bottom out of the theory of Alison, Jeffrey and Co." So utterly regardless is he of the common decencies of language, that it is impossible to attribute it to the proof-reader when we find him saying that one thing is the "very antipode" of another.

The second part of Mr. Finck's book is, if possible, worse than the first. His ideal of beauty is as poor and mean as his ideal of romantic love. That kind of beauty which can be heightened by pomades and powders for the complexion, and by surgical appliances for straightening noses, is not the kind which our descendants will strive to perpetuate. There is something peculiarly gross and offensive about all such topics to a right-minded person; and to find them discussed in fullest detail in a book which is expected to influence scientific opinion on a subject of profound importance, is certainly one of the most curious freaks that a non-insane maker of a book has yet been guilty of. Mr. Finck pretends to be an admirer of expression as well as of mere animal beauty. But a fine and noble expression is absolutely incompatible

with such absorption in the details of the toilet as he recommends. It is impossible for a girl to practise 'making eyes' before her looking-glass, as he urges her to do, without showing the marks of that vacancy and insipidity by which "the faces of many fair women are utterly spoiled and rendered valueless." He quotes this other fine passage from Ruskin: "There is not any virtue the exercise of which even momentarily will not impress a new fairness upon the features;" but he is of too insensitive a fibre to know that there is also not any vanity or vice that will not in time ruthlessly destroy whatever is admirable in the face of man or woman. H.

[WE think our readers will find the above letter interesting as containing the strongly expressed views of a woman belonging to that class which believe they have discovered worthy substitutes for some of the attractions which have proved successful hitherto in bringing into existence this much-discussed romantic love. — ED.]

#### Grindelia squarrosa.

A VERY interesting find was made here recently by one of the High School boys, who is making botany a specialty. The 'find' consisted of several specimens of a composite plant unknown here before, but which has been decided by several competent authorities to be *Grindelia squarrosa*, a plant said by Coulter to occur "from the Saskatchewan to Texas, and westward to the Sierra Nevada."

The three or four specimens were found in a pasture, at some distance from the railroad. How they came there is the question which is puzzling those who have seen them, as their true home is said to be so far to the westward. I have heard that a few specimens were once found in Ottawa in this State, but cannot vouch for the truth of the report.

L. N. JOHNSON.

Evanston, Ill., Sept. 14.

#### The Term 'Topography.'

THE significance of the term 'topography' has undergone a rapid specialization in modern scientific usage that is noteworthy as an indication of the increased attention incidentally given to the study of physical geography. A conspicuous improvement in the methods of geographic teaching in England has been commented on in recent numbers of *Science*, and attributed to a growing recognition of the economic bearing of geographic facts. Mr. Keltie has shown that an entirely novel method of treatment, and a rapid advance, have resulted from this altered attitude. There is, however, tacit admission, to which Mr. Davis calls attention (*Science*, x, No. 240), that the nature of the relations of 'physiography' to human development is but vaguely understood, and that progress is at present retarded by uncertainty of aim. Mr. Davis effectively points out the difficulty: that for teaching-purposes there has not been sufficient inquiry into the principles of geographic evolution, "for topographic development is the key to a real understanding of the forms of the land about us;" that "physiography now is in a low position," and "most immature" as a science in itself. Generalization is as yet difficult, or of questionable profit: "attention should be directed instead to the minute morphology and systematic development of individual topographic forms." Physiography must make the same order of advance that biology has made out of the old natural history, with its aimless catalogues of wonders, and study the "simpler type-forms carefully before attempting to understand the complex associations of forms that make up a country or a continent." Mr. Keltie recognizes that it is "typical aspects of the earth's surface," not "extraordinary features," that will serve the purposes of the new geography; "but," as Mr. Davis points out, "he does not say where we shall find a scientific and sufficient investigation of the forms that are chosen as 'typical aspects.'" There is no such investigation. The absence of any thorough and consistent physiographic terminology at once points out the immaturity of this study. . . . 'The Sixth Annual Report of the Geological Survey,' just issued, contains, for example, a number of illustrations that will be seized upon when the proper text-book appears. The choice little woodcuts on p. 229, entitled 'Topographic Old Age' and 'Topographic Youth,' are particularly good, but these terms will certainly be new to most readers." No "scientific and sufficient investigation" of the evolu-